BRUSH WITH RHETORIC:
THE PILLOW BOOK, ARCHITECTURE AND RHETORIC

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ABSTRACT

After all theorising, architects still have to choose form. Addressing the grounds of choice leads to two lines of study: What do we learn from people’s expectations of architecture in everyday life? And, why do designers choose as they do?

Film is a site where questions of interpretation from people’s lives and questions of choice of form are superposed in repeatable events, available for study.

This paper takes a long excursus through both the script and Peter Greenaway’s film The Pillow Book to tease out various complexities entailed in treating architectural design as a matter of rhetoric.

1. INTRODUCTION

After all the theorising, architects still have to choose form. Two lines of inquiry relate to the question of why do we have (choose to have) about us the architectural forms that we do:

- What do we learn from people’s expectations of architecture in everyday life?
- On what grounds and how are forms generated?

The first research interest is interpretative, related to environment-behaviour research, and the second is speculative, deriving from art history and theory but also from research into design approaches and methods, concerning designers’ frames of reference in architecture.

Of the built world in everyday life one can ask what is it about the form that lets me know what I know – a question of form and interpretation. (Although the answer is very often not the architectural form.) Of architects who think of themselves as making art, one can
ask how do the forms you provide cue users into the ideas with which you are playing, that have generated the work – again, a question of form and interpretation. The concern, here, is not merely with some form of reconciliation or compromise between what is expected of architecture in everyday life and what artist architects want to pursue but with selecting from a very rich field of architectural offerings a particularly useful, particularly interesting subset.

There is a rhetorical dimension of both interpretative research lines that is not commonly acknowledged. We engage with the built world having certain expectations of architecture in everyday life. It persuades us that certain behaviour is appropriate here, other there, for example. With architectural design, architects have to persuade themselves of the worth of their formal choices before they subsequently have to persuade others.

Film and television are interesting, here, because these sets of questions are superposed on media which allow repeatable events. In his 1995 film *The Pillow Book*, Peter Greenaway considers, centrally, writing, noun and verb, message, form and interpretation. That is, he deals with similar incommensurables to those entailed in the consideration of architecture, its inhabitation, its generation and its criticism. In discussing the written and the moving image in *The Pillow Book*, this paper teases out various complexities entailed in treating architectural design as a matter of rhetoric.

2 INCOMMENSURABILITIES AND RHETORIC

Consider the following crude diagram:

1. Everyday life = (built) environment
2. Everyday life x X
3. Everyday life x X
4. Everyday life x X
5. Everyday life x X

Figure 1: Levels of Interpretation
The diagram shows the mediated relationships most of us have with architecture and everyday life, whatever role we currently occupy. Five sets of relationships are shown. It is not an exhaustive list. At the simplest level, an unreflective person does not distinguish the built environment from the environment, generally, that is, from everyday life. At the most complex, a critic develops an understanding of a design architect's artistic intention through discussion, examining models, sketches and other representations (an iterative process), through which she views the work itself. The arrows indicate a contemplative sequence, generally from right to left, but cycles indicate iterative processes. Perhaps most of the links between elements ought to be indicated by cycles. That 'X' attached to 'Everyday life' in each row has the nature of a qualifier. It indicates a colouration of everyday life, something in the consciousness of the interlocuter rather than separately in the world 'out there'.

Clearly, the diagram is a sketch. But, a number of useful observations may nevertheless be made. There are several contributing dimensions of the complexity apparent:

1. The interpretation of the artefacts of any cultural mode is of several levels of complexity. We could usefully speak of 'interpretation to the fourth degree', for example.

2. The links in the chain of levels of interpretation (at I, II, III, IV) are provided by what may be described as 'rhetorical disjunctions' – allowing transitions from 'discourse' in one realm to discourse in another, phenomenologically incommensurate one. Everyday life, works of architecture, representations of them, the ideas that inform them and the interlocuters involved are not of the same logical or phenomenological status.

3. There is an unknowable measure of reflexivity entailed in all but the most elementary level of engagement with the built environment. That 'X' is also there to warn us that reflexive processes can be iterative. In some situations, we may have to speak of 'interpretation to the sixty-seventh degree'.

Once we are talking across incommensurate dimensions, situations or realms we are necessarily speaking analogically or metaphorically – with all the associated opportunities for plays of tropes, knowing and unknowing, and we are in the realm of rhetoric.

Rhetoric can be understood as the theory of (re)presentation – how representation should be done rather than what it is, and comes with two emphases:

(A) Aristotle: 'Rhetoric is the art of finding the available means of persuasion.'

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion (primary rhetoric, its impressive aspect), or of persuasive discourse, and

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(B) The art of speaking well (secondary rhetoric, expressive, its literary aspect).  
But, to speak of an ‘art of speaking well’ begs all sorts of questions concerning what does this ‘well’ mean and who is doing the judging – where these questions inherently appeal to frames of reference, to habitus and so on.

Pointing to the rhetorical element in all interpretation of architecture is to stress the fact that interpretation is never an end in itself. For designers, 'speaking well' is often the point of their work and what it means to do that is what occupies the deliberate readers of architecture – from art designers to critics and sophisticated clients.

For most users of the environment, a political dimension enters. In having persuasive intent, otherwise neutral-seeming interpretation is always undertaken to some purpose. Here, rhetoric can be conceived of as a branch of political decision theory. And, within that model, rhetoric has been conceived of as a design discipline, with rhetors designing verbal texts.

An architectural project is at the very least a provisional hypothesis about a housed enterprise. It is a cluster of propositions about the use of a building by more or less well known people to more or less well specified ends, given certain beliefs about the people’s physical abilities, their sensory capacities, their hopes and desires, and about their lives before they came to that place. Convincing an audience to accept a formal proposition may be less difficult than to convince oneself as a designer.

Now, consider the detailed changes that a designer of moving images, a filmmaker, makes between one representation of the project and another. Analysis of Greenaway’s project can suggest arguments with which he convinced himself.

3 THE PILLOW BOOK

If skin were parchment, and the blows you gave were ink,
Your own handwriting would tell you what I think.
(Shakespeare, 1594, As You Like It, Act III, Scene I, lines 13-14)

Greenaway’s 1995 film The Pillow Book spans twenty-four years in the life of Nagiko Kiyohara. Nagiko’s father is a writer and calligrapher. On each occasion, two rituals accompany Nagiko’s birthday. First, in thick red ink, as he intones the words, her father writes a traditional blessing on Nagiko’s face and, to complete it, signs his name on the nape of her neck. Later, as Nakigo lies down to sleep, her aunt reads passages to her from
The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon, reminding her that when she turns twenty-eight, in 2000, The Pillow Book will be one thousand years old.13

Sei Shonagon was a Heian period, Imperial court lady-in-waiting about whom very little is known beyond what is contained in her private journal notes and various lists she made together subsequently published as The Pillow Book. Much loved, The Pillow Book is generally regarded as one of the finest works of Japanese prose ever written. Given her evident sensuality, intelligence and wit, Nakigo is to be thought of as a modern Sei Shonagon.

Two interconnected strands drive the narrative: Nagiko’s personal development – particularly sexual and artistic, and the power relations between the Kiyohara family and that of her father’s publisher. Additionally, throughout, the sensuousness and aesthetics of calligraphy and flesh illuminate the story and readings from Shonagon’s Pillow Book provide both frame and wry commentary. But the events that resolve the relationship between the two narrative strands concern a second pillow book – that made from the flayed skin of Nagiko’s lover, a multilingual English translator of literature and father of their daughter.

3.1 The Script

Cinema has never been able (...) to exist without a text – as origin, as method, as critique, as criticism, as description, even as title. Like almost all painting, the cinema is a slave to text to the point of reducing imagery to the role of illustration.14

There are at least five sources of the information from which opinions of Greenaway’s project can be formed, across which the details vary:

- The 1984 original, five page idea for the film, called 26 Facts about Flesh and Ink,15
- The 1994 Script given to the Producer,
- The 1995 Film, itself,
- The three page, 1995 (presumably) Synopsis of the Film, and
- The 1996 publication containing the texts here noted.16

To these should be added, of course, The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon (c1000).

Three or more superposed structures can be discerned in the published Script of ninety numbered Sections that bear on appropriate or interesting interpretations of the narrative.
Figure 2: The structure of the narrative in the Script
**Kyoto / Hong Kong / Kyoto**

In the Script, the narrative of *The Pillow Book* unfolds first in her house and near Kyoto until Nagiko escapes a bad marriage, then in Hong Kong as she becomes a wealthy model and, finally, between her house near Kyoto and the publisher’s later premises in Hong Kong. That is, there is a very strong three-part structure, based on Nagiko’s primary location.

The first of the three Parts begins (in Section 1) with Nagiko at four and is completed when, at eighteen, escaping from her marriage to the publisher’s nephew, Akira, she says goodbye to her Aunt on the platform of the local railway station (Section 25). The second Part is in Hong Kong and shows how Nagiko becomes a successful model, how the erotic connection between fine calligraphy written on her body and sexual pleasure dominates her private life until she falls in love with Jerome, the English translator, and finishes with his funeral (Section 66). Knitting Parts two and three together are thirteen books Nagiko writes on men’s bodies and offers to the publisher. The third Part focuses on Nagiko’s use of the delivery of the last six books to retrieve the Sixth and to punish the publisher for his many sins against her and against her family (Section 88).

For, the three Parts also relate to the second narrative strand. In the first, we are made aware that the publisher exacts a personal sexual price for publishing Nagiko’s father’s writings before he pays for the manuscripts. This always takes place on Nagiko’s birthday. Further, he sees to it that Nagiko marries his nephew. The publisher exercises financial power over the family and some sexual control over father and daughter. In the second Part, in Hong Kong, Nagiko seduces the publisher’s lover, Jerome, only to fall in love with him. And, in the third, having induced in the publisher a craving for her embodied books, Nagiko exercises power over him until, with delivery of the Thirteenth, he accepts his own execution.

The three-Part structure can be taken instead actually to be the last three, visible portions of a four-part structure: China / Japan / China / Japan. Here, the first pair would refer to Nagiko’s parents – in Shanghai (where they met, before the film’s narrative begins) and then Kyoto. The second pair refers to Nagiko: finding her true self in Hong Kong then exercising it from the family home near Kyoto. Thus read, China is a (chaotic) source of relationships and art and a place of beginnings, almost innocent, Japan the place of refined expression, exquisite art and a source of subtle, knowing cruelty.

There are echoes from the failed Japanese bid for an empire in China, here. In the Script, Nagiko is in Hong Kong from 1992 until 1997. Which brings us to the European / East Asian issue buried in the timing of the Script and never explicitly referred to: the return of...
Hong Kong to China from its European colonial controllers, Great Britain. Henceforth Europeans will be in Asia on Asian terms – as Jerome learns. Its omission can partially be explained because the Handover takes place some months after Nagiko leaves Hong Kong and because, thereafter, it is not place that matters but the restoration of appropriate order.  

**Imperfect zipperung**  
The three-Part primary location structure is overlaid with a pattern of what were to be systematically intercut Sections from other locations. Each Section in Kyoto, for example, is matched immediately with a Section in Hong Kong. Roughly speaking, odd Sections are set in Kyoto, even in Hong Kong.

In the first Part, the intercut Sections in Hong Kong serve to establish the adult consequences for Nagiko of her pleasure on her birthday in her father’s calligraphy and her Aunt’s reading. In the third Part, Nagiko completes a book in Japan and we then read of its reception in Hong Kong. In the central Part, in Hong Kong, such alternations are less obvious and less strictly observed, but do occur for the stretch of Sections leading up to Nagiko’s first meeting with Jerome. Here, Nagiko’s modelling career substitutes for her younger life in Kyoto in the alternations with the continuing calligrapher lover Sections.

In the first two Parts, the force of this imperfect ‘zippering’ is to balance a focus on issues with narrative progression. In the third Part it is the narrative progression.

**The skew symmetric pivot**  
In ninety Sections, half way occurs between Sections 45 and 46.

In Section 40 Nagiko first meets Jerome, in a semi-screened, private booth in the fabulous Cafe Typo. She asks him to write on her. Dissatisfied with the result she offers him another chance and, again dissatisfied, she is prevented from storming off only by Jerome’s challenge to show him what she means by writing and by asking (macabrely and unwittingly prescient) that she “Treat me like the page of a book. Your book.” The challenge so disconcerts her that she spends the next three Sections, in her apartment, coming to terms with it. This trio of Sections is the pivot around which numerous skew symmetries of the whole Script rotate. For, after this, Nagiko experiences several apotheoses: from listener to reader, from transcriber to author, from passive girl to active woman.

But, the most important apotheosis is that no longer will she simply get pleasure from having a male calligrapher write on her body. She will herself develop as a brilliant
calligrapher and write on men’s bodies. In Section 44, Nagiko first tries. In Section 46, her work having so improved, she announces: “I am now going to be the pen, not just the paper.” She is urged to submit the work to a publisher by Hoki, the pill-popping young Japanese photographer who is obsessed with her. (Neither knows that it is her father’s publisher who has relocated to Hong Kong.)

After this work is rejected (not least ‘because of the quality of the paper’), Nagiko sees Jerome leaving the publisher’s office, recognises the publisher and understands their relationship. She seduces Jerome and an intense affair ensues (Sections 51-55, 57). Out of anger at the betrayal, Nagiko quickly sends Books Two and Three (on two Swedish brothers, the Books of The Idiot and The Innocent), Four (an older man, The Book of the Impotent) and Five (a fat American, The Book of the Exhibitionist) to the publisher and refuses Jerome entry to her apartment.

Out of despair and on the suspicious suggestion of Hoki (who supplies the drugs), Jerome takes his life, perhaps accidently. Discovering him, Nagiko mourns for eighteen hours, then writes the key, Sixth Book on his body, a private act of reverence.

Jerome is buried and Nagiko returns to Japan. But the jealous Hoki lets the publisher know of the text. Late at night, Jerome’s body is exhumed and, back at the publisher’s workshop, unwrapped, flayed and the skin prepared as a pillow book.

Nagiko uses the delivery of Books Seven to Thirteen to trade for that Sixth. This is when the Kiyohara family finally inverts the power relation with that of the publisher. Because of his lust for these very special books, Nagiko has power over the publisher. With the delivery of the Thirteenth, he returns the Sixth, accepts his own fate and dies.

The Script finishes with Nagiko, at home in the year 2000, placing the pillow book of Jerome beneath a bonsai and then performing the birthday ceremony on their daughter.

### 3.2 The Film

A script is to a film as the program is to a work of architecture. A script deals both with the tasks, purposes, values and responsibilities associated with the project, and with their collective formulation in the form of an agenda for designing.

Obviously, the Film is not the Script. It has images and sound as well as text. But, important differences occur in the structuring of the narrative and what is added to our understanding of it through the images and sound.
Dividing the Film into what appear to be ‘natural’ segments (on the model of the Sections in Greenaway’s Script), it consists of eighty-five ‘Scenes’. Most of the ‘foreshortening’ (for the reduction reduces the distance from core issues) occurs in the first and last, Kyoto Parts though there are distracting pieces removed from the central Hong Kong Part as well.

In the Film, Hong Kong appears not as a unitary city but as an urban country, a set of locations – Kowloon (principally), the New Territories and so on. Some locations are changed. Kyoto’s ‘Matsuo Tiasha’ Shrine substitutes for the family home as the place of the calligraphic ceremony on Nagiko’s sixth birthday and substitutes for a street in a Japanese city when we see Nagiko as supermodel star of a fashion show, for example. It is the place of Nagiko’s wedding in the Film where ‘a Shinto shrine’ only is noted in the Script.

This last is part of another quite noticeable change. There is greater emphasis on the Heian period, on Sei Shonagon and her Pillow Book through their visual and acoustic treatment in the Film.

But, the presentation of Jerome has hardened. In the very short Scene 55, after delivering the First Book and having spent the night making love with the publisher, Jerome, smoking, looks just a little too self-satisfied. Then, his motives for returning to Nagiko’s apartment are cast in doubt toward the end of Scene 60, where he and the publisher enter the Kowloon bindery to find The Fifth Book, the fat American, laid out on the floor. Jerome cannot retrieve the attention of the publisher and storms out – subsequently to arrive outside Nagiko’s locked door. As Greenaway presents it, Jerome’s pain may be for the loss of his place in both their attentions.

**Symmetries and Balances**

In the Script, the most important symmetry is that between the challenge issued by Jerome (that Nagiko become a writer, Section 41) and the seduction of Jerome (Section 51), carefully setting the development of the artist against the development of the woman. And, each of these events has an outer companion: it is fifteen Sections earlier than Jerome’s challenge that Nagiko leaves her home (Section 25) and it is fifteen Sections later than his seduction that Jerome is dead (Section 66). Nagiko’s parting with Akira is symmetrical with Nagiko’s parting with (the living) Jerome. Again, the development of the woman is carefully set against the development of the artist (Nagiko writes The Book of the Lover in Section 67). The comparison is made twice twice: once before and once after the pivot of the narrative and across the pivot once between the inner and once between the outer
pairings. These are skew symmetries, the characteristic ‘geometrical’ mode of the narrative.

There are other, actual symmetries together with a number of conceptual symmetries of interest distributed differently in the Script and the Film.

The Script’s overall structure supports the transformation of Nagiko from ‘paper to pen.’ Depending on how they are counted, there are thirteen or fourteen calligrapher-lovers to balance the thirteen Books. This is one of the ways in which the Film is compressed in length. There there are only seven such lovers (Scenes 4 to 28)\(^3\) – though, outside Jerome’s involvement (live or dead, Scenes 29 to 73)\(^1\) they can be considered to balance the last seven Books (Scenes 75 to 84).

But the Film is considerably more carefully symmetrical – Parts I and III more nearly equal each other and the pivot of the narrative is centred in the Hong Kong Part II. In the Script and in a voiceover in the Film, Nagiko remarks on the importance of two fires in her life. She leaves Japan after a fight with her husband leads to his burning her books and she leaves Hong Kong for Japan after burning all her belongings on the death of Jerome. The fires determine the breaks between Parts, the major sections of her life. They are very nearly symmetric in the Film (Scenes 13 and 69) and less so in the Script (Sections 23 and 74).

**The shift in the pivot**

The centre point in the Film is Scene 43 – Nagiko and Jerome making love in numerous positions, clad in kimonos. But the pivot in the film is Nagiko’s and Jerome’s whole affair – centred on that centre point, from Scenes 40 to 47. Greenaway emphasises this. In the Script, Shonagon was only to appear in inset images. In the Film, Shonagon and the Heian recur throughout in the soundtrack and often take over the whole screen, however briefly – but only in Part I. Except for Scene 46 (and, at the end, Scene 85). Shonagon is seen in an inset image in the centre bottom of the screen. She looks up and faces the audience and reads from her *Pillow Book*, restating central themes of Greenaway’s project:

> I am certain that there are two things in life which are dependable: the delights of the flesh and the delights of literature. I have had the good fortune to enjoy them both equally.\(^3\)

And, there is another emphasis. It is in this same Scene that Nagiko silently requests and receives the birthday ceremony from her lover. It hasn’t occurred since Scene 8 (when Nagiko turned nine\(^3\)) and will next appear in the very last Scene.
The publisher appears with Nagiko in the first part of the Film up to Scene 10, bar the first, and he appears in the last ten Scenes of the film, bar the very last. But, these are mere
symmetries and not apparently otherwise of much interest. Though, perhaps they suggest
that the publisher is so integral a part of the structure of the film rather than an
‘independent’ narrative agent that it recasts our reading of what Nagiko is doing with the
Books.

The shift between Script and Film in the pivot of the overall narrative changes the
emphasis from balancing personal change in Nagiko – her development as a writer against
her development as a woman, to a much wider compass. With the pivot where it is in the
Film, its second half clearly focuses on Nagiko the artist writer / calligrapher, with the
Thirteen Books, and on the resolution of the power relations between herself, a Kiyohara,
and the publisher, Yaji (spelling?34). Here, Nagiko is a powerful agent. The first half of the
Film concentrates both on the interaction between the sensuousness of receiving
calligraphy on her flesh and Nagiko’s sexual maturing – from innocent(?) pleasure
through unsatisfying promiscuity to love, and on establishing her development as an
economically independent woman. Nagiko is there a relatively passive recipient of change.
The shift in the pivot accompanies a distinct sharpening of the focus on the issues of
overall interest and their clear contrapositioning.

Similar symmetries and contrapositionings occur within each half.

In the first half, in Scene 20 Nagiko undergoes her apotheosis from accounts clerk to
supermodel.35 In Scene 1 we are introduced to the birthday ceremony – the mature
calligrapher writes on Nagiko, and in Scene 46 Nagiko commences her first masterpiece,
herself now a mature calligrapher. That is, this first half of the Film employs
calligraphy, in Scene 63, at the narrative centre of the half, is Nagiko’s transformation from
‘wife’ to ‘widow’.

In the second half, after the affair, it is the preparation, delivery and reception of the
Thirteen Books on which the narrative concentrates. The First Book is that offering written
on Jerome that initiates subsequent tragic events, the Sixth Book (of The Lover) written on
his dead body. The Thirteenth Book (of the Dead) is that written first on a young sumo
wrestler and finally ‘written’ with straight-bladed razor, at one stroke, across the throat of
the publisher. These are very nearly symmetrically disposed within the half: the First
Book is delivered in Scene 48, the Sixth is written in Scene 64 and the Thirteenth delivered in
Scene 84.36 Scene 63, the narrative centre of the half, is Nagiko’s transformation from
‘wife’ to ‘widow’.

This half exhibits further structuring. The Sixth is the only one of the Books that actually
is made into a book (a pillow book of three volumes), and it is very important to Nagiko’s
personal development. But it is the centrally numbered book, the Seventh (The Book of the
Seducer, delivered in Scene 75) that is the pivotal volume in the series between herself and the publisher. It is the one that induces the publisher to await each subsequent Book.

Curiously, the publisher only directly receives the odd numbered Books. Of the even numbered Books, he is not present when his assistants receive the Second (The Book of the Innocent), the Fourth (The Book of Impotence) runs down the street, the publisher has to disinter that Sixth, the Eight (The Book of Youth) has left his premises before the publisher finds out, he rejects the Tenth (The Book of Silence) thinking it a fraud, and the Twelfth declines to deliver himself. If we disregard the First (The Agenda in the Script, The First Book of Thirteen in the Film), then there is no central Book. There are in fact two sets of six, alternating. The other odd numbered Books, received directly by the publisher) may be regarded as a set of bad omens (Books of the Idiot, Exhibitionist, Seducer, Secrets, Betrayed, Dead, respectively) and, even with the pejorative implications of the name of the Fourth, the even numbered Books might be regarded as omens of potential, perhaps good. But, as in the reading of Jerome, there is a shift from Script to Film. Here the comment is perhaps on love itself and a hint is contained in the change of the never delivered Twelfth Book’s title. The change from The Book of Births and Beginnings in the Script (Appendix) to The Book of False Starts recasts our reading of each member of the even numbered set.

That is, the second half of the Film employs contrapositioning, symmetry and alternation to complete both the narrative and a particular reading of it.

As it happens, these devices are ‘topics’ in classical rhetoric and Greenaway’s practice accords with Aristotle’s understanding of rhetoric. As Richard Buchanan puts it …

Aristotle defined rhetoric as the faculty of finding the available means of persuasion with regard to any subject about which we deliberate. Along with its counterpart, dialectic, rhetoric supplied the arguments and thought which could be used by the artist to shape a particular form.

Calligraphy

There have been many film-makers who have intimated that the script for a film can hold out more possibilities for excitement than the intended final product (…) It is this very intimidating gap between text and image which is, in many ways, the subject and the substance of the film of THE PILLOW-BOOK.

Remember Nagiko’s comment to Jerome on his not being a writer (Section 40, Scene 28): “You can’t write. That’s not writing. (…) You aren’t a writer – you’re a scribbler.” This
comment entails the deliberate confounding of scribal and authorial senses of ‘writer’ and, even within the scribal sense, of both mere technical instrument and self-conscious artist. This confounding is possible with calligraphy – where the aesthetic qualities of what is written are often matched by those of how it is written. As Shonagon herself says:

Writing is an ordinary enough thing; yet how precious it is!40

Calligraphy has the properties Hollander claims for northern European painting and that she claims ultimately led to the cinematic tradition of story telling:41

• Being compositionally monotonal (with calligraphy actually black and white), it more powerfully stirs the emotions,42
• What is before the eyes is incomplete; there is always more outside the frame than what is made explicit, spatially and temporally, and
• The image is often frozen at a point of loss of equilibrium or at that point where action is about to start or has just stopped.

And, good calligraphy has an architectural nature …

Chinese calligraphy is a rhythmic art. Unlike the Western word, which is a combination of many letters, a Chinese character is composed of different shapes of lines and dots, with each combination occupying a unit of space on paper. This unit of form is an arrangement where all parts, left, right, top, bottom, and the four corners, are perfectly balanced and echo each other – an architectural structure.

If a piece of calligraphy is well done, it should be a work of fine art creating the impression of space and depth. (…) The Chi’i expressed in calligraphy is an essential means of creating the atmosphere of space, for space is the stage upon which all action and movement takes place.43

Greenaway’s most obvious assault on that ‘intimidating gap between text and image’ has for some time been made through the use of calligraphy. This is no accident for, as he says himself …

The hieroglyph could be used as a template for the cinema.44

Calligraphy is a notable feature of The Draughtsman’s Contract (1982), of Prospero’s Books (1991) and of The Pillow Book.45 Calligraphy is both image and text at once, particularly in the Chinese and Japanese traditions celebrated in this Film. Moreover, calligraphy is both product and frozen act. Levelled at a translator, Nagiko’s comments, though complaining of Jerome’s handwriting nevertheless complain he is no author, he
originates no ideas.\textsuperscript{46} Jerome’s challenge in response initiates the pivot in the Script. When Nagiko later becomes a writer (calligrapher) she will write (be an author).

Jerome is the catalytic agent, the dual nature, translator/writer, bisexual spirit at the heart of the Film who, in being the subject of love and in fathering their child, transforms (translates?) Nagiko from late adolescent to adult. With his challenge, he induces her transformation from paper to brush (writer). He ‘makes Nagiko aware of an opportunity that she wasn’t even aware she was waiting for.’\textsuperscript{47} And, it is calligraphy that is the appropriate dual-nature vehicle written on the here dual-nature (sexual, literary) medium of naked flesh that is the incantatory act in these changes.

Greenaway says that, at the end of the Film, Nagiko has finished with being an artist who paints on bodies and that her tattooed body (which we see in the last Scene as she feeds her baby), in including the last words she wrote on Jerome in permanent form on her own body, is evidence of this.\textsuperscript{48} She tells her daughter that because she now has experience she can write her own Pillow Book. (The journals she was keeping at various times were destroyed in the Fires.)

The images
My reading of Greenaway’s project begins with its architecture: two narrative strands, three themes, two constant motifs distributed over three sets of locales, zippered together, with various skew symmetries pivoting on Nagiko’s personal development – that, in the Film, are presented in sets of embedded symmetries.

Which is to say that by ‘architecture’ I mean the geometry of its (one-dimensional) spacings and of its internal relationships.

To see symmetry or balance is to be interpretative. But, it is not sufficient to rely on the ‘architecture’. Events distributed on the architecture lead to interpretations.

The three-Part structure is readily apparent in the images of the Film. Both Kyoto Parts, at the beginning and end, are shown in black and white, Hong Kong and, importantly, the Heian, in colour.

Think of Greenaway’s structuring of the whole image.\textsuperscript{49} In The Pillow Book, there are up to three simultaneous layers of image, more or less exposed, with up to three other surface images occupying different proportions of and positions in the whole screen. That is, the gaze can both penetrate into the image and flicker around it as well as experience different sequences at the various positions on the screen, in different time periods and/or different locations.
Describing two Scenes should be sufficient. From Figure 3 it should be apparent that the ‘zippering’ in the Script is only vestigially apparent, if at all, in the Film. But, zippering does occur within Scenes rather than across a series of Scenes – this is particularly so in Scenes 3 and 85, the last. With the possible additional Scene of Nagiko’s and Akira’s wedding, in terms of their visual composition, these Scenes are the most complex in the Film.

Scene 3 continues the events of Scene 1. Nagiko, aged 4, is being read to from Shonagon’s Pillow Book at bedtime. As her Aunt reads, Nagiko opens the sliding door to reveal her father and the publisher in another room. The Scene follows both the reading inside the room and the transaction that can be seen through the door opening sometimes simultaneously, sometimes the one, sometimes the other – framed view, frame, view or even viewer. This is in black and white. Interpolated between the eight shots of the interior foreground and the six shots of the intermediate ground, usually alternating, there are nine different coloured images from the Heian period, illustrating the text being read in Japanese. These begin in insets then expand to whole screen size. The exemplar ‘elegant things’, inset images, located in the centre, just above the halfway mark of the screen, shrink back to size before disappearing. Characteristically, though not exclusively, insets suddenly appear a moment after the dominant screen image. The coloured images are labelled in white English italics, while the subtitles to the rest of the Japanese are in similar white italics, in the subtitles zone of the screen, set against black.

There are further complications in the editing of the Scene. After the publisher is seen giving Nagiko’s father cash, in the fourth viewing of them together, the screen momentarily is completely given over to the green patterning of a banknote – which then appears three shots later only in the subtitles zone. This ‘greenover’ occurs roughly two-thirds through the Scene to emphasise the transaction. Other images appear in two or more versions.

The other principal complication is provided by what are best described as ‘whiteovers’. These are pages from Shonagon’s Pillow Book, in beautiful, ‘grass style’ calligraphy – initially section 150, then Section 29 (five times) and Section 016 (four times) and, once, a page from Nagiko’s journal, interleaved between the zipperings, before each coloured image.50 Most often, the image begins as the small square in the top right, but sometimes simply appears over the whole screen, quickly becoming transparent to reveal the action beneath. As Figure 4 shows, in several instances, the whiteover has the next coloured image appear within as an inset and, as the coloured image encompasses the whole screen the white page simultaneously shrinks to the square inset at top right. Thus, the Heian mediatess between the Nagiko / Aunt interior and the father / publisher exterior. It frames
both narrative lines in Greenaway’s project: foretelling Nagiko’s interests and future yet providing sardonic comment on what Nagiko unintentionally reveals and dimly understands.
Figure 4: The sequence of images in Scene 3

- Nagiko opens door, revealing publisher & father, each adjust their clothes
- Nagiko in bed
- Aunt reading
- Looking back at Nagiko
- Father gives publisher MS
- Publisher gets out his wallet
- Aunt reading
- Publisher gives father cash
  - ‘Greenover’ of banknote
- Nagiko, watching
  - Green banknote pattern
- Father, publisher
- Publisher getting up & leaving
  - Aunt reading to Nagiko who closes the door

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**COLOUR**

- Pillow Book section 150
  - White square
  - Duck eggs
- Pillow Book section 029
  - Shaved ice in a silver bowl
  - Wisteria blossom
- Pillow Book section 029
  - Plum blossom covered in snow
  - Aunt reading beneath
- Pillow Book section 029
  - A child eating strawberries
- Pillow Book section 016
  - Naked baby on silks
  - Noblewoman asleep
- Pillow Book section 016
  - Nagiko's journal
  - Shonagon looking in a mirror
- Pillow Book section 016
  - White square blinks out and back in
  - Shonagon being visited by a lover
In sum, there are thirty-four images that occupy the whole screen during the one Scene the coloured images of which have usually first appeared as insets.

Figure 4 attempts to convey some of the pattern of this complexity.

Scene 85 is both less and more complicated than Scene 3. It is less complicated in the black and white for only one long sequence is involved. It begins with Nagiko being assisted to place the three volumes of the pillow book of Jerome inside a pot, under a bonsai, followed by a group of women arriving with children as the two assistants leave, Nagiko feeding her baby and then performing the birthday ceremony on her. But this is intercut with coloured images from elsewhen in the Film as an out of sequence recapitulation of key events in it. These too are preceded by whiteovers. Scene 3 has seventeen separate sources of images (including the two kinds of lettering). Scene 85 has twenty-four and up to three levels of layering of the whole screen at the same time as there are two or more inset images and two or three soundtrack sources.

And, apart from these complexities in sequencing, in the ‘attack’ and ‘decay’ of images within Scenes, there are additional rich variations on the shape, position and size of inset images (various rectangles, squares, circles) together with their position in the whole (single inset top right or left, centred insets above and below the centreline or on it, annuli), and other fractionings of the whole (split screens horizontally or vertically, vertical stripe or subtitles zone, single or multiple corners). Even the generally white lettering – whether as label, subtitle or design, sometimes is red and sometimes flares into red.

Think of the overall, one-dimensional organisation of the Film as its ‘architecture1’. This one-dimensional structuring of the delivery of its two-dimensional images is its ‘architecture2’. ‘Architecture3’ could refer to the camera-controlled, two-dimensional windows provided into the Film’s three-dimensional fictional world and ‘architecture4’ could refer to the composition of individual images and of the arrangement of elements within the space they reveal – both of which I haven’t discussed.\(^5\)

The crude diagram in Figure 1 suggests, on Aristotle’s account of rhetoric, that the challenge for the filmmaker will be, at each level of architecture, to formulate persuasive arguments for the making of that feature of the film. Which, reciprocally, suggests that, returning to that Figure, a set of rhetorics will be necessary for a work of architecture – one for each rhetorical disjunction – at the least to convince the architect as s/he works.

3.3 Myth

Van Gennep’s term for the ceremonies that mark persons’ crucial developmental transitions in social life is ‘rite of passage’.\(^5\) Van Gennep thinks of such a ceremony as a
three-part structure inserted between two different ‘steady’ states. The structure entails an intensified version of the first state, a limbo state between (neither one nor the other) and, finally, an intensified version of the second state. Quite unlike what we are shown of Nagiko’s and Akira’s marriage, western marriages conventionally entail rites of passage of this kind with their bucks’ and hens’ nights (or ‘showers’), wedding ceremonies and honeymoons, for example.

For Nagiko, the three Part structure of the Script and Film exhibits just that rite of passage structure though it concatenates the steady states at each end with their intensified versions – passive erotic experience as paper, firstly; aggressive aesthetic expression as brush, thirdly. The chronological compression in Script or Film allows several years in each case to be appreciated as ‘intensified’.\(^\text{53}\) In both vehicles for Greenaway’s project, it is the pivot that serves as the limbo state rather than the more obvious Hong Kong Part.\(^\text{54}\) But structural isomorphy is not why rites of passage might be of interest, here. Rites of passage are the very stuff of myth. Greenaway is mythmaking.

If this project is mythmaking, it is very much more than mythmaking in the colloquial sense. It is not a self-serving lie. As Barbour points out:

1. Myths offer ways of ordering experience
2. Myths inform man about himself
3. Myths express a saving power in human life
4. Myths provide patterns for human actions
5. Myths are enacted in rituals.\(^\text{55}\)

All of these are present in Script and Film. The different pivots imply interesting differences of emphasis of what are the steady states and what Script and Film are really about, what is the myth being told.

In the Script, the steady states are youth and adulthood as a calligrapher. The pivot trio of Sections is the only sequence in the Script where none of the other major characters appears with Nagiko – not members of her family, her Aunt/the maid,\(^\text{56}\) the publisher, Jerome or Hoki. This pivot frames the whole narrative as a hero myth, being concerned primarily with Nagiko, and with her artistic development, and makes setting the Hong Kong Part in 1997 without acknowledging its significance at the least perverse.

Alex Selenitsch once observed that Greenaway’s films commonly concern the possible roles of artists and it is the artists in them who are killed.\(^\text{57}\) But, at the end of this Film we leave Nagiko Kiyohara not only a powerful woman exercising power over artists but an artist, the principal artist, herself, very much alive. The European women’s problem provided one answer in *The Draughtsman’s Contract* in 1982 – how to keep control over
one’s destiny, dignity and fortune despite the apparent authority of men, is answered similarly in Japan, two centuries later, as Greenaway devised two years later. These bookend films both offer murder as the solution in aesthetically exquisite ways but Nagiko has the better of Mrs Herbert and her daughter Mrs Talmann for Nagiko actually has her baby (literally in hand) and she controls her own fortune directly.

However, in the Film’s pivot, Nagiko and Jerome are a loving couple. Neither sex nor calligraphy is part of a transaction. This draws attention to the transactions in both intensifications and therefore to their presence in the steady states. In the first Part, the transaction is to accept calligraphy on the self for erotic pleasure, in the third to provide calligraphy for (restoration, establishment of) appropriate order. That is, the narrative is not only personal, not only concerned with Nagiko. Oblique or indirect though it is, this concern for social and familial order in the narrative (and the aesthetic order that reveals it) is the one arena in the Film where Greenaway engages with collective human concerns. On Barbour’s account this is what makes the Film a myth, for ‘a myth is a story which is taken to manifest some aspect of the cosmic order’.

5 RHETORIC, AGAIN

We cannot see the whole of a room at once. We have to build a model of it in our mind from the partial impressions our eyes provide as we move our heads. This is even more true of whole buildings. We cannot see a work of architecture. We know it through such a constructive process. What time does to us with film, television or music, space does to us with architecture: preclude us from ‘seeing’ it all at once. A work of architecture, even a city, is a reality-supported virtual reality just as the virtual reality in a film is image-supported or that in a novel text-supported. Nor is a work of architecture literally graspable in any other way.

Further, engaging with architecture is not commonly like engaging with a film. It is more like our engaging with television. We are not alone with others in a dark space concentrating on moving images. We are engaged in our everyday lives, sometimes paying attention to the architecture, most often not. To get you to understand my architectural intent, I must first get you to pay attention to the architecture and disengage you from everyday life. This phatic task is the first rhetorical task of a work of architecture.

By means of the manipulation of form, architecture can, in principle, seek to satisfice the expectations of architecture in everyday life only in a restricted number of ways – that is, for example, through …
Assignment of particulars of the program
Topology of spatial arrangements
Ambience of spaces
Measure and relative scale
Articulation of plane surfaces.

But, for built form to make the points that works of art make a difference with what might usually be expected in these ways must first be noticed. And, that difference must be placed where it will be noticed, or have a form that is noticeable, or have attention drawn to it in some other way. The architecture of buildings is most likely to provide opportunities for such points to be made or to be indicated where the architecture is exposed – as, for example, in the form of a building's massing or silhouette. Or, on facades, at the Entry, doors and other openings, at thresholds or whenever the wall fabric is pierced, in the form of columns or other relatively freestanding elements, or whenever the organisational principles of the whole are revealed. The architecture of buildings is exposed, importantly, also, in the existence of those spaces that are not specific to a building's program, that result from the very nature of the built environment. They result from its spatial extensiveness and from the fact that any one place must be approached from some other, relatively distant place – pathways, corridors and stairs, for example, gateways, forecourts, entries, lobbies, ante-rooms, and so on.

This implies that, at every level of design, an architect has rhetorical opportunity and perhaps an obligation. This is another potential source of rhetorical complexity in architectural design: what are the ‘arguments’ that convince the architect to make particular decisions at each of these scales of formal consideration and how do the arguments for formal choice at one scale relate to those at any other scale?

Now, the discussion in their book suggests that Kaufer & Butler (1998) regard the task of a rhetor as the design of a presentation to an audience – that is, that the task can be analysed as I have analysed Greenaway’s project in its two major manifestations. However, they provide a very much more interesting idea of the rhetor’s design task:

We suggest that what rhetors design, elementally, are abstractions – a public and its trajectory through time and space – that are embodied by and large through the abstractness of language. (9)

Greenaway clearly has a particular kind of audience in mind, perhaps an ideal, an audience that is prepared to work hard to extract the riches he tries to cue through film. He is a rhetor in this particular sense.
But what this more profound view of what rhetors design puts squarely before architects is that they, too, design abstractions – a public and its trajectory through time and space – that are embodied by and large not through the abstractness of language but through the abstractness of architecture. Here, the two lines of study become one.

NOTES

1 Cognitive archaeology most closely approaches a sustained treatment of the question aimed at the material world of human culture and posed in this form. See, for example: Ian Hodder, *The Meanings of Things: Material culture and symbolic expression* (London: One World Archaeology No 6, Unwin Hyman, 1989).

2 In a private communication, Simone Brott pointed out that there is no necessary privilege in the order given here to the items in the columns. The order is dependent on the agenda of the person suggesting it.

3 This would be without entering into discussion of the endlessly deferred meaning beloved of many postModernists.


9 Rhetoric is the oldest of the systematic treatments of language. It has had a close association with architecture since Roman times – and is crucial to the Art of Memory. See: Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (1966, rpt Harmondsworth: Peregrine/Penguin, 1978) and, also, Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). In turn, the Art of Memory was taken to China by the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci. See: Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1984, rpt London: Faber and Faber, 1985)

10 See Kaufer & Butler 1996, for example.

11 Antonia Stevens showed me the reference. However initially seemingly apt, it comes from a very different context from what is subsequently reported here.

It is called a pillow book because it was of a size that could be kept in the drawer in the side of the solid type of pillow used by Japanese, a proper place for the most personal belongings — like a western bedside cabinet. Greenaway would also be aware that, in modern times, the term often refers to an illustrated manual of sexual technique given to a bride at her wedding. (Sei Shonagon, The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon, ed & trans Ivan Morris 1967 (c1000a, rprt Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, 1971), 375-376.)


Peter Greenaway, Flying Over Water/Volar damunt l'aigua (Barcelona & London: Fundació Joan Miró & Merrell Holberton, 1997), 18. Mitchell also makes clear that text and photographic image have always and are always intrinsically linked and extends his analysis to show that this connection is not confined to the photographic. See: W. J. T. Mitchell, Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994, pbk 1995), 281-322, especially, and elsewhere.

Greenaway 1996, 6-10. That is, it was written during the filming of A Zed and Two Noughts (1986), two years after The Draughtsman’s Contract (1982).

Greenaway 1996. This contains, in addition, a one-page Introduction to the whole (5), a two-page introduction to the script (11-12), and, as Appendices, the translated texts of the Thirteen Books (102-112) and excerpts from Nagiko’s diary (113-116).

The narrative begins with Nagiko at this age because she then first sees her father together with his publisher and becomes aware of something untoward in the relationship but which she understands only much later.

Nagiko’s Aunt, mother and grandmother were complicit in her father’s humiliation, for example.

It cannot be a full explanation because Greenaway could have determined on any day he wanted for Nagiko’s birthday – the date that positions her affair with Jerome and his death. The date itself is unimportant. 15 March is over a week before the important Japanese festival associated with the Spring Equinox – and, in the Appendix of Excerpts from Nagiko’s Diary, the date appears as 12 February. More obviously, Greenaway could have set the predominantly Hong Kong Part of the Script in another year and not have affected the narrative as it is presented. In the Film equivalent, no year is noted – either avoiding or diffusing the issue. (There, the one date definitely signified is New Year’s Eve, 1999, when, at midnight with fireworks exploding outside, the publisher dies.)

Chaplin provides a completely different explanation and reads the Film in sociopolitical terms in regard to its manifestation of Orientalism. See: Sarah Chaplin, “From Pillar to Post”, in Building Dwelling Drifting: migrancy and the limits of architecture: papers from the 3rd ‘Other Connections’ Conference, ed. Stephen Cairns & Philip Goad (Melbourne: Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The University of Melbourne, 1997), 55-61.

The idea of the body as paper is in the 1984 text but the more immediate stimuli for writing on the body might be attributed to a Robert Gober sculpture and a Nikita Mikhalkov film. The Gober sculpture is that of a man’s body from the waist down, ‘face’ down on the floor, naked but for socks and shoes and with music inscribed on his buttocks. This sculpture is modelled on a figure from the lower left edge of the right wing of Hieronymous Bosch’s late 1400s tryptich The Garden of Earthly Delights – the music mocking celestial music (see: Walter Bosing, Hieronymous Bosch c. 1450-1516: Between Heaven and Hell, ed. Ingo F Walther (1973, Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1994), 51-60). Greenaway exhibited the work as part of an exhibition he curated in Rotterdam. (Peter Greenaway, The Physical Self (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, 1992), 85)
the 1991 Mikhailov film, Urga (known in English as Close to Eden), the character Sergeuei (played by Vladimir Gostukhin) has the music to his favourite song tattooed on his back.

21 Greenaway prefigured this structure in the 1984 text, item H (Greenaway 1996, 7).


23 Greenaway: ‘there are two apotheoses in life which are always, ultimately, dependable; one is literature, the other is flesh. Sooner or later we’re going to be magnificently stimulated by one of those things.’ (Christopher Hawthorne, “Flesh and Ink: The Salon Interview Peter Greenaway” (http://www.salonmagazine.com/june97/greenaway970606.html, 1997)


25 Hoki had suggested a ‘Romeo and Juliet’ strategy, knowing full well what the outcome was for Romeo in that case, one presumes.

26 Clearly, I have determined the ‘Scenes’ for this analysis and another person might determine them differently. I can only point to the internal coherence of the structuring discerned for self-fulfilling support of my analysis. Additionally, there is a peculiar arbitrariness to some of the numbering of Sections in Greenaway’s Script: some Sections are very short, some contain a number of events in a number of locations.

27 Though Greenaway explains the shortened form of the Film (at 126 minutes) as a concession to the producers and to cinema programming, he also notes that he has preserved a two hour and forty minute version ‘to remind ourselves of this satisfactory length’ (Greenaway 1996, 11).

28 Matsuo Tiasha Shrine was one of Shonagon’s Empress Sadako’s favourite places to visit, apparently – though Matsuo Tiasha is nowhere mentioned in the Morris translation (Shonagon c1000a).

29 Greenaway 1996, 46.

30 Though Greenaway (1996, p 11) says that only three calligrapher-lovers were omitted.

31 Jerome could be said to have a ‘ghost’ existence in the narrative outside Scenes 29 (where he and Nagiko first talk) and Scene 64 (when he dies). Yet not in the Film. In the Script, he is seen in the background when Cafe Typo is first introduced, in Section 22, eighteen Sections before he and Nagiko first talk (in Section 40) and exists only in pillow book or ghost form after Section 66, twenty-four Sections from the end of the Script.

32 This passage appears to be an invention of Greenaway’s. In the Film, like Japanese calligraphy, there is no punctuation. It is avoided in the delivery.

33 In the Script. Curiously, in the Film, Greenaway changes Nagiko’s birthday ages from the odd numbers in the Script to even ones. As I will observe, below, Greenaway does deliberately pay attention to odds and evens.

34 Jerome cries out his name when being ignored by the publisher as he examines the Fifth Book (of the Exhibitionist), on the fat American, in his bindery.

35 In both Script (there dated 1993) and Film, this apotheosis takes place two divisions after her nadir is presented – in a tawdry flat on her twenty-first birthday, struggling unsuccessfully with a Japanese typewriter, trying for ecstasy from typewritten text pressed to her flesh.

36 Interestingly, in the Script, the Sixth Book can only be made the ‘centre’ piece (in Section 67) of fourteen books if the rejected book based on herself and the middle-aged Englishman is included in the set – with this first book in Section 48 and Book 13 in Section 88. This is a false symmetry in any case for, of course, a sixth thing is actually neither the centre of fourteen or of thirteen things – only symbolically so in this narrative. Interestingly, of the seven Books that are delivered
to the publisher after he steals the Sixth, the Tenth (The Book of Silence, delivered in Section 81 in the Script, in Scene 80 in the Film) is at their centre.

37 See: Kaufer & Butler 1996, Table 3.1, 52-54, on ‘topical patterns’.


39 Greenaway 1996, 12.

40 Shonagon c1000b, 94-95. Morris gives this as: “Letters are commonplace enough, yet what splendid things they are!” (Shonagon c1000a, 207). Morris is, this time, not to be preferred over Waley. Unless the original Japanese term meant ‘epistle’, ‘lettering’ is a particularly eviscerating term for how calligraphy is understood in the East.

Waley comments on the importance of one’s calligraphy in Heian court society (Shonagon c1000b, 13). The distinction between content and form arises because Shonagon had the reputation of knowing her poetry and of writing allusive poetry well.

Sampson reports that ‘up to about the end of the Eighteenth Century, more than half the books ever published were written in Chinese’. This is without including derivative scripts such as the vernacular Japanese used by Shonagon. Nowadays, the Chinese and Chinese-derived scripts still provide a very large second to publishing in the Semitic-derived alphabets (Arabic, Roman, Cyrillic). See: Geoffrey Sampson, Writing Systems: A Linguistic Introduction (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1985), 145.

The comparative semantic and graphic systems of Chinese and Japanese compared with English are described in Sampson – particularly the advantages of the Chinese (almost entirely) logographic system (145-171) and the extraordinarily difficult task for readers of Japanese (172-193) blamed by linguists on Heian period literati such as Shonagon.


42 Greenaway is aware of this: ‘You know, it’s still felt that truth is best seen in black and white, and colour deals with ephemera.’ (Hawthorne 1997) He immediately adds: ‘There’s also the much older convention that black and white is somehow in the past and colour’s in the present.’


Once Europe discovered (paid attention to) them, Egyptian hieroglyphs served as models for the private symbolisms of the alchemists. (Alexander Roob, Alchemy & Mysticism: The Hermetic Museum, trans Shaun Whiteside (Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 1997.) These were graphical devices thought to have material power beyond mere cryptography. An amusing version of the idea is put forward in A. E. Van Vogt, The War Against the Rull, (1959, rprt New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1999). Jerome was also a translator of Hebrew and Yiddish and the Cabbalists’ similar interest in the power of the written is explored in Umberto Eco, The Search for the Perfect Language, trans James Fenstress 1995 (1993, rprt London: Fontana / HarperCollins, pbk 1997), 25-33 (especially). In another recent film, the protagonists are likewise confused between signifier and signified, thinking that manipulating the former will influence the latter, but this time the confusion is between numeral, number and reality. (Darren Aronofsky, π (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).)

Particularly in responses to their work, what Greenaway (less paranoidly) and Aronofsky have both exposed is an anxiety about the power of the esoteric learned.
Egyptian hieroglyphic texts are projected on the wall of Nagiko’s bedroom in Scene 63 – presumably because of their association with cults of the dead. This is the part of the Scene where a very groggy Jerome is undressing before getting on to Nagiko’s bed – his deathbed.

And, since Prospero’s Books, it is the same calligrapher, Brody Neuenschwander, here particularly assisted by Yukki Yaura and nine others, who assists him in this wish. Kenneth Breese was the calligrapher for The Draughtsman’s Contract.

Jerome’s name is carefully chosen. After his funeral, his mother explains to Nagiko that he was named after his father’s Jesuit confessor in Singapore. The Jesuit would have been named for St Jerome, the fourth-century scripture scholar and exegete from northeast Italy, known for his complete translation of the Hebrew Bible and also for an essay on translation.

In the Film, Greenaway makes the link explicit. Just before Hoki approaches him in his shop to tell him of the buried text on Jerome’s body (Scene 64), the publisher is gazing at an image of Georges de La Tour’s painting of St Jerome on his computer (the 1620-25 Grenôble version without the cardinal’s hat – see: Georges de La Tour and his World, ed. Philip Conisbee (Washington & New Haven: National Gallery of Art & Yale University Press, 1997), 267).

St Jerome is also important to Greenaway’s 1991 film Prospero’s Books. There, de La Tour’s 1630-32 version of the same painting (with the cardinal’s hat) is shown in the script (Peter Greenaway, Prospero’s Books: A Film of Shakespeare’s The Tempest (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991), 40; cf Conisbee 1997, 267) to illustrate the idea for Prospero’s appearance in his distressed state. For that film, however, because of its influence on the design of Prospero’s study, Antonello da Messina’s 1418 painting of St Jerome in his study is more important (Greenaway 1991, 50; Luciana Arbace, Antonello da Messina: catalogo completo dei dipinti (Florence: Cantini, 1993), 53).

But, in this project, Greenaway is also having a joke or two. Jerome certainly is not a St Jerome. His sexual proclivities would have incurred the righteous wrath of the disputatious man known also for his two books in defence of virginity. (The Catholic University of America, New Catholic Encyclopedia (1967, rpt Palatine, Ill. Jack Heraty & Assoc, 1981), Vol VIII, 872-874).

A second joke, a grim one, perhaps, is implied by the image on the computer screen when the publisher turns his attention away. It is de La Tour’s painting of a Penitent Magdalen (with the Smoking Flame, c1636-1638, Conisbee 1997, 271) and fades as the main image cuts to Nagiko burning her books and belongings in the second fire, prior to leaving Hong Kong.

Nagiko’s given name is Sei Shonagon’s own (Shonagon c1000a, 9). According to Waley so was her surname, Kiyohara (Shonagon c1000b, 20), but Morris gives this as ‘Kiyowara’ (c1000a, 9).


Logically, this should only mean that she no longer needs others to write on her.


Greenaway both writes and directs his films. This time, also, he is listed after his usual collaborator, Chris Wyatt, as editor (in the Film credits and the Production Notes though not in the 1996 publication).

The ‘whiteover’ device occurs throughout the Film. In Part I the source is Shonagon’s Pillow Book but thereafter it is usually Nagiko’s own.

There are at least two other ‘architectures’ in the Film. I have not discussed: (1) the architecture of camera movements within shots and between related shots – such as the predominance of tracking from left to right, of motion from left to right, and of panning from right to left, for example; and (2) the architecture of the sets in the Film, the ‘actual’ architecture, including the two very interesting apartments Nagiko occupied in Kyoto (with Akira) and Hong Kong that contrast so
with the traditional homes of the Kiyoharas near Kyoto and the publisher in Kowloon. Production design credits are given to Emi Wada (in Japan), and to Wilbert van Dorp and André Putman and art director credit to Vincent De Pater.

In these usages, because it also entails purpose and content, ‘architecture’ is a better word than either ‘structuring’ or ‘ordering’.


53 Though anthropology provides numbers of examples of weddings and other rites of passage that can entail years in any of the three phases of a rite of passage (see: Edmund Leach, Social Anthropology (London(?): Fontana Masterguides, Fontana / Collins, 1982), Chpt 6, 176-211).

54 So, though almost in passing, Chaplin (1997, p 57) speaks of the Film as a rite of passage, for example, technically she is correct.


56 In the Script, the same actress is noted as to play both parts and, in the Film, Hideko Yoshida does – as well as playing Sei Shonagon in some scenes.


Here, Jerome is not an artist, though his calligraphy improves to an improbable extent between his first meeting with Nagiko at Cafe Typo (Scene 29) and the Paternoster work of Scene 45. And, no one could have believed that he was responsible for the elegant calligraphy of his ‘suicide’ note that Nagiko writes (in Scene 64).

58 Surprisingly, perhaps, this then places the Film with Greenaway’s allegorically socio-political, subtle and unsubtle, films The Belly of an Architect (1987), The Cook The Thief His Wife and Her Lover (1989), Prospero’s Books (1991) and The Baby of Mâcon (1993).

59 Barbour 1974, 20, his italics.

60 Iannis Xenakis cited in Nourizat Matossian, Xenakis (1986 rpt London: Kahn & Averill, 1990), 56, said: ‘The experience of space in architecture is reversible but time in music is not.’ Nor is it reversible in film.

61 I prefer to use the term ‘satisfice’, here, rather than ‘satisfy’. This follows Simon's use of it. (Herbert A. Simon, The Sciences of the Artificial (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1969), 64ff). The term refers to the satisfaction of a standard to a degree adequate for some specified purpose rather than to optimal or complete satisfaction of it. My use of the term derives also from my belief that, for what I am discussing, adequate satisfaction is possible and complete satisfaction is not even in principle possible or demonstrable.

62 In Watching Water (1993), though I have not been able to verify it, Greenaway is supposed to have said:

The start of a film is like a gateway, a formal entrance-point. The first three minutes of a film make great demands on an audience’s patience and credulity. A great deal has to be learnt very rapidly about place and attitude, character and intent and ambition.  

(starship (http://starship.python.net/crew/amt/quotations/peter-greenaway.html (last mod 25 November 1998)))
From the very opening of projection, including the credits, in this Film, three minutes marks the end of the first shot of the Film proper: with Nagiko, aged four, in black and white, having her face painted. After the credits, three minutes expires in Scene 2 – a fashion show in Hong Kong, just as the first appearance of Sei Shonagon in an insert occupies a large part of the screen that has just had its first ‘whiteover’ (from her Pillow Book, Section 150) and she describes, in fashion show voiceover style, a costume worn by Empress Sadako. That is, in the first three minutes of this Film, the only major theme of narrative, image or soundtrack not to be introduced is the relationship between the publisher and Nagiko’s father.
Rhetoric thus became a mainstay of priests, lawyers, politicians, writers and all who would persuade, in particular those who addressed a wide audience. Today, there is hardly a persuasive field which is untouched by its methods. From the Greek ‘rhetor’ who addressed juries to modern leaders who address global audiences, rhetoric is a indeed a powerful tool. Contemporary cynicism. Today, the use of the word ‘rhetoric’ sometimes approaches a derogatory form, implying the use of fancy language to persuade, much as sophism lost credibility amongst the Greeks, and much for the